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# 'ZAMBESI SEEDS FROM MR MOFFAT': SIR GEORGE GREY AS IMPERIAL BOTANIST

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## Abstract

While Sir George Grey's interest in botany is not unknown, it has tended to be discussed in passing, and usually in connexion with the gardens he founded on Kawau Island later in his life. Grey in fact had a considerable interest in botany and was active in the science from early in his career, maintaining, for example, a long correspondence with William and Joseph Hooker who, at the time, were turning the royal gardens at Kew into a centre of imperial botanical research. This article considers Grey's botanical activity in detail, locating it in the context of the period's model of 'improving' governorship and the imperial networks he made use of, while acknowledging also the very genuine interest Grey had in the science.

Keywords: botany, cinchona, Colenso, Darwin, empire, evangelical, Grey, Hooker, improvement, Kew, networks

## Introduction

Grey's interest in botany dated from quite early in his career, as a short piece by an anonymous writer about an excursion with Sir George and Lady Grey into the countryside around Auckland, written in the late 1840s or early 1850s, shows:

His Excellency and Lady Grey now went forth, and soon they reached the place whither they desired to arrive. Upon the discovery of the wild plant, His Excellency the Governor took a spoon and lifted the plant out of the earth and examined its roots, saying to his orderly at the same time, 'Come and inspect this plant, it propagates itself by striking its roots into the earth at some distance from the parent stem.'

Orderly: 'How has Your Excellency ascertained this?'

His Excy: 'I know this to be the case by the appearance of the roots, or branches, or seeds, some portions being dark in colour, and some light.'

Orderly: 'Oh sir, you are in great error.'

His Excy: ‘What is my error?’

Orderly: ‘You say, that the part of the shrub which vegetates is both black and white.’

His Excy: ‘What I have asserted is correct, the black part is the seed, the white part is the new fruit.’

The laughing now gave place to wonder. The controversy was long but the orderly was at length obliged to yield to the superior knowledge of His Excellency the Governor.<sup>1</sup>

It is a curious little piece, and a revealing one. Enlightenment is offered to the orderly and the reader; the class structure, too, is confirmed, with the servant obliged to admit his social superior’s greater botanical knowledge. In particular, it shows the interest Grey took in plants and their biology.<sup>2</sup>

## Early botanical activity

Grey’s interest in plants seems to have grown during his time as governor of New Zealand, partly thanks to the encouragement of William Hooker, director of the royal gardens at Kew, who in 1850 had suggested he start a botanical garden in the colony.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, Grey sent Hooker packets of New Zealand mosses and small drawings of them made by a friend of his, Dr Charles Knight, which he hazarded would ‘really be of use’ to Hooker in his work on the botany of the country.<sup>4</sup> Hooker wrote back enthusiastically early in 1853, thanking Grey for the packets and the ‘excellent drawings’, which, he said, had arrived just in time to help inform the cryptogamic portion of the *Flora Novae-Zelandiae* that his son, Joseph, was working on. In return, Hooker sent back ‘garden seeds of various kinds’ that, he felt sure, would thrive in the temperate New Zealand climate.<sup>5</sup>

The next year, while in London en route to the Cape Colony to take up the position of governor, a busy Grey found time to write to Hooker about some New Zealand tree ferns and other Pacific plants he wanted him to have, and noted with pleasure the introduction to the *Flora Novae-Zelandiae*, which Joseph had sent him:

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1 ‘An account, by a New Zealand native, of an afternoon passed with Governor and Lady Grey’. Grey New Zealand manuscripts [GNZMS] 23. Auckland Central Library.

2 For a brief discussion of Grey’s botanical activities, see E. J. Godley, ‘Biographical Notes (75): Sir George Grey (1812–1898)’, *New Zealand Botanical Society Newsletter* 99 (2010), 13–18.

3 See James Home to George Grey, 6 June 1850. Grey New Zealand letters [GLNZ] H32.10. Auckland Central Library.

4 George Grey to William Hooker, 24 October 1852. DC 74, ff. 75–6. Archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

5 William Hooker, letter to George Grey, 24 April 1853. Grey Letters [GL] H40.1. Auckland Central Library.

Will you thank Dr Hooker for me for the copy of the introduction to the botany of New Zealand which he was so good as to send me. I have hoped constantly to thank him in person—but each day when I hoped to get to Kew some new documents of the most pressing kind have been laid upon my time and attention, and Lady Grey and myself have both been very unwell. Would you tell Dr Hooker that I do not remember ever having read any scientific treatise with greater pleasure and interest, as well as instruction—and that these feelings have been shared by all those with whom I have conversed regarding it[.]<sup>6</sup>

In the same letter Grey wrote that he 'longed to see [Kew] gardens'—such a phrase suggests that Grey's interest in Kew, and botany more generally, was very real. Hooker for his part replied enthusiastically, describing the New Zealand tree ferns he had obtained via Grey's graces as 'magnificent specimens' and the 'dried plants' from the Pacific as 'treasures'. Hooker ended his thank-you letter with an invitation to Sir George and Lady Grey to visit Kew while they were still in England, though history does not record whether they did.<sup>7</sup>

Grey's botanical interactions with Hooker intensified during his period at the Cape, which was a botanical region exciting much interest at the time (Hooker thought there was 'not a more interesting flora in the world, nor one with a more peculiar or perhaps greater variety of plants covering a like space of ground').<sup>8</sup> At the end of 1855, Hooker wrote Grey a long, detailed letter, noting an application Grey had made for plants for the Cape (Grey wanted eucalypts especially, presumably because they were drought-tolerant) and requesting South African plants in return.

You will perhaps kindly return the case & filled with S. African plants as we are now building a new & very large Conservatory for the cultivation of Trees & large shrubs; I should be glad of any such of those as are less likely to succeed from seed, or as may happen to be at hand, including the now common ones likely to be in our gardens. Seeds also of the same & other plants will be very acceptable[.]

We are forming a magnificent collection in our Museum of Vegetable Products. I venture to send you some notes which serve as a little guide-book:—but from the Paris Exposition Universelle I have 40 large cases coming. We are building a very large new Museum in addition to the existing one & if you can help us with any Cape things we shall be very much obliged—& we shall be most happy to reciprocate in any way we can.<sup>9</sup>

6 George Grey to William Hooker, 15 July 1854. DC 74, ff. 75–6. Kew Archives.

7 William Hooker to George Grey, 26 July 1854. GL H40.3. Auckland Central Library.

8 William Hooker to George Grey, 13 December 1857. GL H40.5. Auckland Central Library.

9 William Hooker to George Grey, 27 December 1855. GL H40.4. Auckland Central Library. Hooker noted that it was 'astonishing how serviceable the Eucalypti [Kew] sent out have proved in Ascension Island, growing where nothing else would'.

Just as Grey had once sent New Zealand plants and mosses to England, and received 'useful' English plants for the colony in return, so now he was going to send South African plants to Kew, receiving in return species that could be useful in the Cape Colony. Three years later, in 1858, Grey wrote to Hooker saying that he had sent him a packet of seeds 'from the neighbourhood of the Zambesi River', which the missionary Robert Moffat had given him (Grey said he thought Hooker was the person 'rightfully entitled' to the seeds).<sup>10</sup> Hooker replied a few months later, thanking him for 'Zambesi seeds', which he noted were germinating. In his letter Hooker acknowledged Grey's help in having circulated 'notices for contributions' to Kew from different parts of the Cape Colony and described the new glasshouse for Cape plants that he was planning:

The Flora is an extremely rich one & we thank you much for having circulated notices for contributions from different parts of the Colony. We have indeed vast Collections at Kew (the best of all in every department of Botany) at the British Museum, in Harvey's private Collection &c &c.—And the old adage still stands good 'Ex Africa semper aliquid novi' [always something new out of Africa] ...

We are planning a new Conservatory for Plants of the Cape temperature, 400 feet long and 100 feet wide for its whole length:—chiefly for trees and long shrubs, Protea &c. They have outgrown our largest houses and many have died.<sup>11</sup>

New Zealand mosses and tree ferns sent back to England, English seeds sent out to New Zealand, African seeds and plants remitted to Kew and plants from Kew proposed for Africa—in all this we see what has been termed 'imperial botany' in action. Grey sends back, or arranges for others to send back, interesting botanical specimens to the imperial centre, to further the goals of science and industry. In return, he can expect to receive useful European seeds and plants with which to enrich the flora of the colony. In doing this, Grey was not merely showing the interest in arts and sciences that was expected of governors.<sup>12</sup> He was in fact very much following the period's model of the 'improving' governor, who left his colony better than he found it, while also assisting in the progress of science at home.<sup>13</sup> This model stood in contrast to the one followed by some earlier imperial governors, who had viewed colonies simply as places for personal financial gain, and whose interest in the sciences had been negligible; it was distinctly the product of the earnest,

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10 George Grey to William Hooker, 10 June 1858. DC 59.119. Kew Archives.

11 William Hooker to George Grey, 4 October 1858. GL H40.6. Auckland Central Library.

12 For a discussion of the interest shown by colonial governors in the arts and sciences, see M. Francis, *Governors and Settlers: Images of Authority in the British Colonies 1820–1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 63.

13 For a discussion of the ethic of 'improvement' in relation to botany, see Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the Improvement of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 91–2, 121.

evangelically minded era in which Grey lived.<sup>14</sup> All over the empire, indeed, amateur botanists like Grey were sending in specimens to Kew—so many in fact that by the time he wrote to Grey, Hooker no longer thought it necessary to send out scientific expeditions to gather plants.<sup>15</sup> One amateur botanist who was sending plants back to Kew who would have been personally known to Grey was William Colenso, who from New Zealand shipped to Hooker ‘many cases of the rarer vegetable productions’.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps one of these plants was the *Senecio greyi* (daisy bush), which Hooker named after Grey.<sup>17</sup> Other plants were who named in the governor’s honour—notably the genus *Greyia* (wild bottlebrush) from South Africa.

Grey’s imperial botany was not confined to correspondence with Kew. A few years earlier, he had written to B. J. Finnies in South Australia requesting seeds for the propagation of casuarinas, eucalypts and other Australian trees, which he thought would flourish in South Africa’s arid climate.<sup>18</sup> History does not record, but it is a fair bet that some of the Australian plants imported at this period survived and reproduced. Today, their descendants can be found everywhere in the republic. We, now, would hesitate to introduce alien species into an environment, aware as we are of the disruption they can cause. Grey, however, saw no problem in the transfer of ‘useful’ plant species around the world. Indeed, he saw it as his duty, telling New Zealand parliamentarians, for example, that he wanted to prepare ‘prospective industries’ based on plants that would give wealth to the country.<sup>19</sup> In this respect he was very typical of his period, with its dual emphasis on not merely dominion over nature but a positive stewardship of it.<sup>20</sup> Later in life, he used his estate at Kawau Island near Auckland to grow a huge variety of ‘useful’ trees and shrubs, ranging from Sri Lankan cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*) to Mediterranean carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and West Indian arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*).<sup>21</sup>

In his 1858 letter to Grey, Hooker had mentioned a colleague, Dr William Harvey, and his projected Flora of the Cape, which he had hoped Grey, as Governor of the Cape Colony, would be able to assist Harvey with. The publication was an important one, and Grey’s assistance most desirable. Hooker mentioned the matter again in a follow-up letter written the next year. Grey, ever helpful to his friend at

14 For a discussion of the impact of evangelicalism on nineteenth-century culture, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), x, 3, 7, 17–18, 26–9, 80, 202. For a broader discussion of the notion of imperial trusteeship, see Christopher Hodgkins, *Reforming Empire: Protestant Colonialism and Conscience in British Literature* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 7–8, 146, 176, 193–4.

15 See Drayton, *Nature’s Government*, 184.

16 *ibid.*, 183–4.

17 See A. L. Rowse, *The Controversial Colensos* (Redruth, Cornwall: Dyllansow Truran, 1989), 119.

18 George Grey to B. J. Finnies, 26 July 1855. Sir George Grey Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

19 See Vaughan Yarwood, ‘The Governor’s Island’, *New Zealand Geographic* 39 (1998).

20 For a full discussion of dominion theology and stewardship, see James Beattie and John Stenhouse, ‘Empire, Environment and Religion: God and the Natural World in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, *Environment and History* 13 (2007): 431–2.

21 See Yarwood, ‘The Governor’s Island’.

Kew despite the considerable burdens of his office, wrote back saying that he tried to assist Harvey in his botanical work and noting that he had obtained some funds for the projected Flora:

I have done my best to help Dr Harvey in his work, in which I shall take the greatest interest, by getting the Parliament to pay a colonial botanist, Dr Pappe—who I am sure will give most valuable aid to Dr Harvey—they have also adopted my recommendation by voting three hundred pounds in aid of the publication of the flora of South Africa by Pappe or Harvey—and will I have no doubt give equally liberal votes in aid of it as the work goes on, and they see its value and worth.

Pray if I can ever be of use in obtaining anything for you do not hesitate to write to me—it will be to me a real pleasure to be of use in your pursuits[.]<sup>22</sup>

‘I have done my best’; ‘if I can ever be of use’—one is struck, reading Grey’s letter, by the warmth of tone and the sincere interest Grey appears to have had in Kew and its success. Hooker was suitably grateful for his friend’s help, writing in 1860 that ‘under your [Grey’s] generous auspices’ the Cape Flora project was progressing most satisfactorily, with the first volume complete and a great credit to Dr Harvey. ‘I have no hesitation in saying’, Hooker goes on, ‘that this Flora of the Cape will be the best & most instructive of all our colonial Floras, & a pattern for the rest:—scientific, yet written in popular language’.<sup>23</sup> In 1863 (by which time Grey had returned to New Zealand to take up his second governorship there), Hooker wrote again, praising Grey for the stimulus he had given to botany at the Cape (Grey had, among other things, published Hooker’s 1860 letter in the *Cape Argus* as a way of encouraging others to collect and study the local flora). Hooker noted the ‘admirable work now rapidly advancing from Dr Harvey’s labours’ and went on to refer to Grey’s encouragement of botany in New Zealand, on the Flora of which his son Joseph was currently working, and which would be dedicated to Grey.<sup>24</sup> These handsome colonial Floras, published with government assistance, were a feature of botanical science in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and it is interesting—though not at all surprising—to see Grey’s involvement in two of them. Though they did little for the imperial economy, they did influence the evolution of contemporary botany, as one historian has noted.<sup>25</sup>

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22 George Grey to William Hooker, 24 June 1859. DC 60. 108. Kew Archives.

23 William Hooker to George Grey, 5 December 1860. GL H40.9. Auckland Central Library.

24 William Hooker to George Grey, 19 May 1863. GL H40.10. Auckland Central Library.

25 See Drayton, *Nature’s Government*, 204.

## Imperial botany for an imperial economy

Imperial botany of the kind Grey was engaged in could, however, have a very marked effect on the imperial economy, as 'useful' plant species found new homes (and consumers) in various parts of the empire. Tea, originally cultivated in China, was grown in India; coffee, whose origins lay in East Africa, was transferred to Sri Lanka; cocoa, the beans of which had quenched the thirst of ancient Mexicans, was cultivated in Trinidad.<sup>26</sup> Rubber, which originated in Central and South America, flourished in Malaysia; indeed, by the early twentieth century, Malaysia was producing more rubber than Brazil. Another American plant that did well in the East was cinchona, from whose bark the anti-malarial agent quinine was derived. As there was at the time no other way to treat malaria, the scourge of the empire's tropical colonies, cinchona (*Cinchona officinalis* and other species) was of considerable economic and social importance, so it is interesting to see it mentioned in passing by Hooker in his 1863 letter to Grey quoted above, in which he points to the cultivation of cinchona in India and Sri Lanka as an example of the 'great things' being accomplished by the botanists at Kew as they went about their mission of spreading 'useful' plants about the world. Busy as he was with prosecuting the Waikato War, Grey picked up on the remark, and wrote back at the end of the year requesting, among other things, that Hooker send him some cinchona plants for his gardens on Kawau:

Could you send me some young Cinchona trees—I am now trying to introduce these here, and have obtained a few from Madras. If you will in a few months send me a case of plants, I will always return them filled with any plants from New Zealand or the Pacific which you may require—I have peculiar facilities for collecting them for you—I have got an island of about 8000 acres, covered in part in forests, and in part in plains—on this I am making huge gardens and plantations, and have several gardeners employed who can get anything you require, and I have correspondents in several islands of the Pacific with which we trade ... I hope this will be very useful to you—and it will be a pleasure and amusement to me to do so, in so far as my time will permit[.]<sup>27</sup>

Again, one is struck by the warmth of tone in Grey's letter, and by his stated eagerness to help Hooker in his work. When it came to cinchona, however, Hooker could not help Grey, as he explained in his reply the next year:

You should be most welcome to a case of Cinchona plants, if we had them to give:—but after we have supplied India & Ceylon, as we were bound to do:—all that remained in our houses, were soon begged for by various Governments, French & English & are all gone, save 3 for our own Greenhouse as botanical curiosities. I think the experiment is well worth trying in your island:—but not on a small scale.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>27</sup> George Grey to William Hooker, 8 December 1863, Kew Archives DC 75 ff. 71–3.

You should require 1 or 2 cases full. They have increased marvellously in India: & you cannot do better than ask Sir W. Denison to have 2 cases full sent to you from the Nilghiris: or if you have more communication with Calcutta, write, & in my name to Dr Anderson, Director of Bot. G. Calcutta, who has a fine stock at Sikkim;—or if Ceylon is more convenient, (in my name also) to G. H. K. Thwaites Esqre. Govt. Botanist at Paradenia & they would gladly send two cases, & you can offer to have the cases returned with Palms, Tree Ferns &c. of New Zealand. You must have a good gardener to care for them & increase them. It is no use doing things of this kind by halves. In Jamaica & Trinidad for want of due encouragement, they have made no progress[.]<sup>28</sup>

Grey did in fact get hold of some cinchona plants and had them planted on Kawau. Alas, they proved a failure, their quinine content being too low to make them commercially useful.<sup>29</sup>

Hooker's 1864 letter is interesting in another way: it demonstrates, in its mention of botanist colleagues in the subcontinent, how well networked Hooker was. In this case, the network was the relatively open one of a shared interest (botany); this was a network that 'outsiders' like Grey were generally welcome to interact with and use, and it was paralleled by other networks of shared interest (for instance, in natural history), which Grey also interacted with and used.<sup>30</sup> Such informal networks were of considerable importance in the empire, as Zoë Laidlaw has demonstrated; they, as much as more formal military or government networks, bound the empire together in a web of mutual interest and obligation.<sup>31</sup> The reasons why 'outsiders' like Grey might interact with such a network varied; in some cases, the motive was simple career ambition, for it might help a young officer or official to be known as the kind of enlightened individual who corresponded with savants on scientific subjects.<sup>32</sup> In the case of Grey's interaction with a botanist such as Hooker, the motive was in part his desire to be the kind of 'improving' governor that the period so much admired.

More generally, Hooker's letter demonstrates how intricately interconnected the empire was. Communications could be vertical, between colony and metropolis, or they could be horizontal, between colony and colony. One set of networks could intersect with another—Hooker's botanist network with Grey's bureaucratic, governmental one, for example. As Tony Ballantyne has observed, the empire in

28 William Hooker to George Grey, 25 March 1864. GL H40.11. Auckland Central Library.

29 See Jim Endersby, *Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 234.

30 See, for example, Grey's extensive correspondence with Richard Owen in the Auckland Central Library. Owen was Britain's leading naturalist in the first half of the nineteenth century and (among other things) the inventor of the term 'dinosaur'. Grey corresponded with Owen from at least 1837 till at least 1854.

31 See Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 13–16.

32 See Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, 33.

truth was a vast 'mesh of networks', a web-like structure of relations extending across time and space and interacting in dynamic ways.<sup>33</sup> Even more basically, it was an empire of knowledge, of information—'data intensive ... a paper empire'—one whose ultimate aim was the ordering of all knowledge (including botanical) into a coherent whole.<sup>34</sup>

This imperial knowledge project was not of course ethically neutral; its purpose, ultimately, was control. Grey's botanical work in this respect closely parallels his more famous ethnographic work with his Māori informants; in each case, he was opening up new worlds to imperial scrutiny and dominion.<sup>35</sup> The parallel, indeed, can be extended. As Jim Endersby has shown, a major preoccupation of Hooker and his fellow Victorian botanists was establishing where plant species had originated and how they had spread across the earth.<sup>36</sup> The specimens Grey sent back to Kew were clues that could help unlock the puzzle of plant distribution. In the same way, the ethnographic and philological work Grey undertook provided data, this time on where human beings had originated and how they had spread across the globe.<sup>37</sup> This was a notion Grey alluded to in an early letter to Richard Owen, in which he ventured to hope that his research into the languages of the extinct Guanches of the Canary Islands might 'prove useful in any enquiry into the origin and dissemination of the different races of men'.<sup>38</sup> In Grey, botany and ethnography/philology sprang, ultimately, from the same intellectual interest: an interest in origins.

## Later correspondence with Joseph Hooker

Grey's correspondence with William Hooker continued till the latter's death in 1865. At this point Hooker's son, Joseph, took up the baton. In the same year, he wrote to Grey complaining about the number of plants Grey had sent to Kew that had perished en route ('we are quite disheartened') and promising Grey 'iris roots'.<sup>39</sup> The next year he promised rhododendrons; it is very possible that the descendants of these plants—assuming they survived the long voyage—are still to be found in New Zealand. Joseph also praised the New Zealand naturalist James Hector ('an able active man'), deeming him the type of scientist who should be sent to oceanic islands adjacent to colonies like New Zealand and the Cape to collect

33 See Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), 13–15.

34 See Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 4–7.

35 For a discussion of the issues of scrutiny and control in nineteenth-century imperial writing, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), 83, 92, 166, 197.

36 See Endersby, *Imperial Nature*, 225–48.

37 For a discussion of the parallels between botany and anthropology at this period, see E. Sera-Shriar, *The Making of British Anthropology 1813–1871* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 51, 73.

38 George Grey to Richard Owen, 22 July 1837. Add. MS 42583, f. 125. British Library.

39 Joseph Hooker to George Grey, 19 December 1865. GL H39.4. Auckland Central Library.

plant specimens ‘while they [the islands] are yet virgin’.<sup>40</sup> Grey was by now dealing with a series of crises as settlers and government troops battled Māori in the central North Island; he nevertheless found time to write to Joseph, thanking him for his dedication of his *Flora of New Zealand* to Grey and listing native plants he (Grey) had recently dispatched to Kew:

I have often intended to write to you, to thank you for the bulbs you sent me, and for several other acts of kindness, especially for your dedication to me of the Hand Book of the New Zealand Flora (which I esteem an honour of the very highest kind) but public cares and often public servants have come on me with such rapidity that other matters were driven from my thoughts, and mental weariness was often so great that I could not bring myself to do anything I could possibly avoid doing for the moment. It was really no want of gratitude that kept me silent—although I heard from Hector that you had lost your New Zealand plants at Kew, and I have had the following collected for you:

Damona [sic] australis	100
Entelea arborescens	20
Metrosideros tomentosa	30
Tacaire [sic]	50
Vitea [sic] litoralis	50
Persoonica toro	50
Pittosporum	20
Maire	20
	<u>340</u>

Three hundred and forty plants in all—healthy—they are selected from the woods on Kawau—and will I trust reach you safely[.]<sup>41</sup>

Reading the letter, one is struck by the scale of Grey’s botanical remittances, as well as by the continued warmth of his one. Clearly, he very greatly valued his connexion with the Hookers and with the royal botanic gardens at Kew.

One of the last letters in the Grey–Hooker correspondence, written in 1868, is in many ways the most interesting. After thanking Grey profusely for the ‘magnificent presents’ he has received from Grey and other New Zealand colonists, and noting plans to create a ‘Great Garden’ in the colony, Joseph chats about the contemporary scientific scene in England:

40 Joseph Hooker to George Grey, 13 January 1866. GL H39.5. Auckland Central Library.

41 George Grey to Joseph Hooker, 9 September 1867. DC 174, f. 270. Kew Archives.

Science jogs on here much as usual, Darwinism still is the leading topic, & D.'s last book has brought many a waverer to his standard. There was always a ray of protection flaunted in the face of his disciples, which those who rallied round it were ready to pull down as soon as the publication of the so-called 'Pieces justificatifs' [sic]—these have now appeared in his 'Animals & Plants under Domestication'—which has produced a profound sensation amongst those who have not read it & were anxious to haul down their colours, to something more objective than the 'Origin of Species'—It is wonderful book: Pro-genesis [sic] is a stumbling block to me: I grant all its premises & all its results, but I do not see how any understanding is reached by the hypothesis of multiplying germs or germander [sic] or atoms. All we can say, as it appears to me, is that the mother cell carries away with it the potentiality to reproduce all the features of the parent, & diffuses that potentiality through every other cell born of itself. How else can we explain the fact that a cell of a leaf of a Begonia becomes a new plant like its parent, & its cells repeat the phenomenon[?] Still to many minds the doctrine of multiplying atoms is a help, & at any rate it colligates all the facts of the phenomenon.

Now Darwin is at work on a book on man! which will I expect, turn the scientific & theological worlds upside down.

Prehistoric archaeology is however the science of the day & is now being worked out in a scientific manner—& the manners &c. of savages are its foundations—Did it ever strike you that the tying of the navel cord is one of the greatest marvels of our nature—I want much to make out whether all savages tie—whether any merely lacerate—or leave to rot. I cannot find that this subject of the habits & customs of childbirth has ever been followed out amongst savages—do pray take it up & get information from Oceanic traders & natives when you can.<sup>42</sup>

Joseph's interest in Darwin and his doings was more than casual; he and the great naturalist had worked together years before on plant specimens that the latter had brought back from the Galapagos (Darwin had found Joseph 'a most engaging young man'). Joseph's conclusions about the islands' plant species had been linked by Darwin to similar conclusions about Galapagos bird species made by John Gould, the period's pre-eminent bird collector and illustrator, and another correspondent of Grey's—together, they hinted at the possibility of an evolutionary explanation for how species had developed.<sup>43</sup> Hooker, indeed, had been one of the first scientists to defend Darwin's *Origin of Species* when it was published in 1859.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, Joseph liked to keep up with his former colleague, now grown famous (or infamous). The two books he refers to are *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, which Darwin had published just months before, and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, which Darwin would publish three years later in 1871. In the latter, Darwin applied evolutionary theory to human evolution, and

42 Joseph Hooker to George Grey, 31 May 1868. GL H39.7. Auckland Central Library.

43 See John Bowlby, *Charles Darwin: A New Life* (New York: Norton, 1990), 256–8.

44 See Endersby, *Imperial Nature*, 5.

detailed his theory of sexual selection. Darwin's theories about racial difference and mate choice as an agent of natural selection were intriguing, but not as upsetting as Joseph seems to have imagined they would be; the book sold well and reviews were generally respectful.<sup>45</sup> What is perhaps most interesting here is the way Joseph chats so freely with Grey about Darwin's ideas, even though Grey was in many respects a fairly traditional Anglican who might have been expected to reject Darwinian notions, especially when applied to human beings.<sup>46</sup> It underlines how open Grey was to the intellectual currents of his period, and shows how far Grey's interests extended beyond the bureaucratic and the governmental. One wonders how many modern-day civil servants and politicians correspond so widely and so interestingly.

## Conclusion

Grey was interested in botany from early in his career and he put considerable effort into it—for example, carrying out a long correspondence with William and Joseph Hooker at Kew. In some ways it was an interest he developed out of a sense of duty because, as an 'improving' governor, he was expected to be concerned with the transfer and propagation of 'useful' plant species. But it sprang, too, from Grey's genuine curiosity about the strange new plants he was encountering in the colonies he was sent to govern, plants that might provide clues as to how life had developed and spread across the earth. Grey left his mark on botany, as he did in many other areas, and his botanical legacy lives on in the plants he sent to Britain and South Africa and in those he helped establish in New Zealand.

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<sup>45</sup> See Bowlby, *Charles Darwin*, 400.

<sup>46</sup> For a useful discussion of Grey's religious beliefs, see Susannah Grant, 'God's Governor: George Grey and Racial Amalgamation in New Zealand 1845–1853' (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2003), 7–11.

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